DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 378 CS 510 159

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TITLE Using Creative Drama in the Multicultural Classroom.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Creative Activities; Cultural Differences; *Drama; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; Pantomime; Play; Readers Theater
IDENTIFIERS Chamber Theater; Guided Imagery; Multicultural Literature

ABSTRACT

The use of creative drama in a multicultural classroom can allow a teacher to establish a student-focused base for experiential learning and can allow students from various cultures to use drama as a way of expressing their individual cultural differences. Using literature about various ethnic groups in creative drama can contribute to the multicultural classroom. The practice of creative drama can help to cultivate creativity and inventiveness. Creative drama addresses all areas of language arts, teaches the important skill of focusing, and acts as a tool in the multicultural classroom for learning to understand and overcome differences. Using creative drama honors the importance of play and thus acts as a learning tool. Creative drama may be implemented in the classroom through the use of guided imagery, mirror exercises, pantomimes, Reader's Theatre, and Chamber Theatre. (Contains 13 references.) (EF)

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1999

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Using Creative Drama in the Multicultural Classroom

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Lorie A. Annarella

Drama is a natural component of the human experience. It exists in every facet of our lives. When we use our body in movement and gesture to convey a thought or feeling we are engaging in drama. We use our senses and our bodys to communicate. Whether we are speaking to a friend, hugging a child or argueing a point, we are incorporating a piece of drama into our lives. Drama is part of our daily experience of living.

WHAT IS CREATIVE DRAMA?

Many of us consider drama to be theatre. We use the terms "drama" and "theatre" interchangeably. However, drama is not theatre; rather, it is only one component of theatre. Whereas the main focus of theatre is on production and audience, drama's focus is on the individual and learning. Creative drama certainly gets its origin from theatre, but the difference lies in the fact that drama uses creative activity for self-discovery and learning, rather than only for production. Drama can include theatre, theatre games (such as improvisation, roleplaying, or mime), and creative play (such as a student portraying he is the the fox in The Gingerbread Man). These are all elements of drama.

TEACHING IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

"Culture encompasses the learned behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population" (Ember and Ember 1990, 17). There are many cultures which define the United States. Today our

classrooms encompass many different cultures and ethnic groups as well. It is important for teachers to remember that the teaching of various cultural and ethnic differences as well as similarities can become the glue that can form student understanding and respect for each other. It is equally important that students be taught that cultural differences exist through ritual, symbol and ideas. When students are taught these differences in various cultures they can better understand what it is to be emtathic and understanding to the needs of those who are different from themselves.

WHY USE DRAMA IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM?

By using creative drama in the multicultural classroom, a teacher can establish a student-focused base on which to foster experiential learning within any curriculum. Students from various cultures can learn to use drama as a way of telling and expressing their individual cultural differences. They can share their similarities and differences with the rest of the class. When creative drama is practiced as a classroom methodology, students become holistically involved in using their imagination and creativity as part of the learning process. Students who become engaged in creative drama activities in the classroom through movement, mime, improvisation, role playing, and characterization can learn what it means to be a human being by making discoveries about themselves and others (Cottrell, 1987). In the multicultural classroom, creative drama can also become an extension of childhood play, in which a student begins to discover, explore, question, and challenge. As drama fosters many desirable cognitive and affective learning outcomes, it can also foster the motivation and understanding of cultural differences.

Motivation

Using drama in the classroom can be a powerful tool to motivate students and

to help them understand materials being taught. Many classrooms still function from a teacher-focused base, with the teacher lecturing or supplying information and students listening and memorizing for the test. Often there is little creative inquiry on the part of students, and even less emphasis is placed on student inventiveness and discovery. A student-focused methodology, such as creative drama, can help to create a responsible learner by engaging interest and permitting student input into the learning process. The student is not only asked to contribute ideas for class discussion, but also to put his or her ideas into practice.

The hands-on approach that is elicited by using drama in the classroom addresses student needs and interests as well as the curriculum. By thinking, speaking, listening, focusing, and moving, the student is involved in every aspect of a lesson. Students are not just passive listeners, but active participants. This involvement creates motivation and interest.

MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

Multicultural literature is literature about any racial group other than the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States (Norton, 1993). Ethnic diversity in the United States is extremely great and stories about various ethnic groups can also contribute to the multicultural classroom. When children are exposed to multicultural and ethnic literature they can begin to formulate a sense of pride for those who are members of the culture being studied in the literature. Pride instills a healthy self worth in children and an understanding of basic character essentials. When children learn about different cultures and ethnicity they become accustomed to it and this helps to eleminate fear of something or someone who is different than they are. Reading children and allowing them to read multicultural and ethnic stories and using creative drama activity further stimulates students' interest in understanding what it is

to be different from themselves.

CREATICITY, INVENTIVENESS AND TRUST

Creative drama can help to cultivate creativity and inventiveness in the multicultural classroom. For example, in task-oriented play, the teacher sets up a drama exercise by asking students to do a particular task (such as becoming Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web*, White, 1952). By being this character, the student begins to understand Wilbur's emotions (e.g., fear), personality traits (timidity), and the situation (living in a barn). Thus, students gain insight into the thought processes of others as well as extend their own thinking. They learn that reading is an extension of the drama of daily life. If they are also encouraged to question and to offer their thoughts and ideas while they are performing and watching creative drama tasks, they can reflect on and actually affect the creative process. Finally, by using the physical aspects of the body combined with oral interpretation, the student can create an environment in which to experiment and create.

CHARACTER, SPIRIT AND ENERGY

Concerned with the energy of the human spirit and characters , drama is truly a unique manifestation of human energy that gives life to characters and situations through interpretation. Giving to the audience becomes the primary goal of dramatic presentation. Through such tasks as mime, guided imagery, and improvisation, students learn to rely on the use of their creative energies. They also learn that the more they use their creativity, the better developed it becomes. Just as reading and writing connects the student to the outside world, drama can connect the student to the inner life of a character.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

The very act of drama teaches academic skills. Language Arts consists of speaking, listening, reading, and writing--all areas that can be addressed in creative drama. Listening skills are used as the student follows the directions of the creative drama leader or hears the presentation of another student. Students participate in speaking both when they present their own enactments and during the debriefing process, in which they discuss what they have seen. (Debriefing is an essential part of every creative drama exercise.) Drama can also extend to the reading and writing processes. Reading can be fostered in Reader's Theatre, in which students choose a written story to perform. Finally, creative drama can be used as a prewriting activity. For example, in learning to write descriptive paragraphs, the teacher might ask students to focus on an exercise using imaginary objects (balls, fruit, pens) in their hands, which they will throw or pass to each other. After experiencing this act of drama, they can easily describe the process orally, and then do so in writing.

Drama also teaches the important learning skill of focusing, which is so much in teachers' minds as an increasing number of students are identified as having "attention deficit disorder." In drama, students practice giving their total attention to the drama leader and to enactments. The mirror exercises I describe below are particularly valuable for fostering students' ability to focus.

Community and Cooperative Learning

We all need to learn to understand and to get along with each other in spite of differences. Creative Drama can become a tool in the multicultural classroom in order to do this. It can help to bind people together. Drama by its very nature focuses on ensemble. Rarely does a performer create alone. Each performer depends on others to deliver the best possible performance. In addition, performance requires trust, group participation, and effort. When creative drama is used in the classroom, a community of

learners begins to develop through ensemble or group participation. This is especially important in the multicultural classroom in that is teaches students to understand that even though they are from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, they can learn and work together. In fact, it becomes crutial that they work together. Because creative drama is a holistic approach to academic learning, it creates trust as students learn to work with each other. In other words, a sense of camaraderie is developed by the group. To foster this, it is important that the creative drama teacher allow each student to work with every member in the class. No one should work only with one designated individual or group for a lengthy period of time. By working with many others, the student learns cooperative learning skills and the value of individual differences.

DRAMA, CREATIVE PLAY AND FUN

Years ago I met an elderly gentleman who told me that he never worked a day in his life. When I asked him what he did, he told me that he spent his life playing. I was astonished! He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and told me he was an airplane pilot, and that he loved his work so much that he never considered it a job, just play. I have always remembered that incident. I reflect on it when sometimes I hear criticism that the arts supply too much "fun" for students. Why then do so many of us believe that if we are having a good time doing something, the activity loses its value? In fact, play is an extremely valuable activity. Johan Huizinga (1950) discusses the significance of play in *Homo Ludens*. He says that one can deny nearly all other abstractions-- justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, even God-- but one cannot deny the seriousness of play. By acknowledging play, one acknowledges the mind.

When we use creative drama in the classroom, we honor the importance of play. Drama becomes our learning tool, and learning is serious business. Students

like participating in creative drama. It enables them to get out of their seats and to move, listen, speak, and discover what it is to be human and how having fun can relate to learning.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT CREATIVE DRAMA IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

In order to use our creativity and inventiveness, we must free our energy and learn to trust ourselves. Because creative drama is nonjudgmental, it encourages risk-taking. The student must first feel basic trust from the creative drama leader (teacher), who becomes a mentor for the students, guiding them through activities and creating a nonthreatening atmosphere for the class. For this reason, creative drama tasks should not be forced upon the student. If a student refuses an invitation to participate, the teacher must have patience. The student can be drawn into the group by allowing him or her to first observe as the teacher works with the rest of the class. The teacher can then return to the reluctant student, issuing another invitation to join the group.

Caution should also be used with students who have agreed to participate. The teacher may show that he or she values students' feelings and views by using such questions as "How do you feel?" or "Show us if you can, and share with us if you would like to." By using such questions, the student is not forced to participate, but rather is asked to share and contribute ideas with the class. This increases student feelings of personal worth.

The creative drama teacher never acknowledges that someone has performed well, but instead focuses on the idea that has been conceived and contributed by the student. The student is asked to participate in the class as a member of a group or ensemble, making the risk of failure low. Students are asked for opinions on the topic being discussed, not for "correct answers." There is no right or wrong answer, thus, again, making creative drama low risk.

Praise should be kept to a minimum. Every student enactment has merit and is discussed as a worthwhile possibility. It is the substance of what is being contributed that is of value, not the manner in which it is being done. Through this process of creative expression, inventive inquiry, and acceptance, students can learn to believe and trust in themselves. Rollo May (1975) discusses creative courage as the discovery of symbols, forms, and patterns on which we can build a new society. The ability to be creative is present within every individual. The use of creative drama helps the student to process that internal ability into an external form, through speech and movement. It allows students to have the courage to create.

There are many different types of dramatic activities, including guided imagery, mirror exercises, pantomimes, Reader's Theatre and Chamber Theatre. In the following sections, I describe how each of these may be used with students.

GUIDED IMAGERY

I have used guided imagery very successfully with elementary, secondary, and university students, and have had excellent results in eliciting motivation, interest, and the understanding of literature. Many of my elementary and secondary Language Arts methodology students told me that they used guided imagery in their own classrooms, and they have had similarly positive results.

In guided imagery, the creative drama leader guides or "side coaches" the students into an imaginary trip, allowing the students to visualize in their "mind's eye" as the trip progresses. Wording and instruction are very important when using creative drama. Students are told that they will be going on a trip into the imagination. Students are never told to "pretend" anything when eliciting a response. They are asked "to be" or "to do" something (Stephen Koziol, personal communication, 1988). I often have students do breathing exercises before we begin a lesson. This helps them to relax, both mentally and physically.

The creative drama teacher forms the framework for the story trip, but the students are asked to supply all of the experiences and details. Guided imagery can provide motivation for a lesson or can be used as a prereading or prewriting assignment and exercise. It can set the mood for a story that the class will read by helping to create empathy for the characters in the story as the creative drama leader (teacher) leads the students through a guided trip where they must make decisions and become involved in the same situations as the characters in the story. Thus, the student develops background for the story, experiencing a direct link to the story through visualization. This link makes the setting, character, and plot of the story much easier to understand and cultivates empathy for the characters.

Guided imagery lessons can also provide a wonderful way to develop topics for a creative writing lesson. They help students to brainstorm a topic for the writing process. For example, students may be asked to dramatize a "surprising" situation, and then to write about it.

The discussion-- or "debriefing"-- involved in drama also can serve as a stimulus for writing. In one type of debriefing, students enact a scene and then report on it by using the images evoked in their five senses-- how they felt, what they saw, heard, smelled, and tasted. The students' debriefings can form the basis of a reading or writing assignment. In this guided imagery activity, the student listens, focuses, visualizes, discusses (during the debriefing), reads, and writes.

It is important that the creative drama leader initiate a debriefing, or discussion session, after every creative drama lesson. This debriefing should tie the creative drama lesson into the larger curriculum of, for example, literacy. Students need to understand that all creative drama lessons have a place and purpose in what they are learning in the larger curriculum.

READER'S THEATRE AND CHAMBER THEATRE

Reader's Theatre and Chamber Theatre are both student-focused activities in which the students use the text as the actual script with group enactment and interpretation as a way to focus on the meaning of the text. Reader's Theatre and Chamber Theatre have some similarities, but there are subtle differences. In Reader's Theatre the story or piece of literature is read from a script or book. In Chamber Theatre, the script is memorized. Students may edit the script in both activities, but the script is usually not as heavily edited in Chamber Theatre. In both mediums there is a narrator. In Reader's Theatre, the narrator does not take an active part in the drama. In fact, the narrator stays away from the immediate playing area, and each member of the cast generally reads a part. In contrast, in Chamber Theatre, the narrator is a more active participant. At times, this narrator will read the piece and the other players will mime a scene; at other times, the narrator will also play a part. While Reader's Theatre uses no costumes, Chamber Theatre often uses them.

In one of my high school literature classes we were studying a 19th century American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. A group of students elected to present an excerpt from "Fate," one of Emerson's essays, as Chamber Theatre. The classroom was set in an arena stage fashion. The players chose the back wall of the classroom to do the performance. Each of five students dressed in black and brought in flashlights. They formed a pyramid and while reciting specific parts of the essay, they positioned the light from their flashlight downward.

After the reading we had a debriefing. The students discussed how fate influences all of our lives. Questions were brought up as to how we can create our own fate. Some students thought that *hope* played an important part in the lives of people. I think Emerson would have approved of this dramatic interpretation!

Drama is an integral part of everyone's life, one that can easily be integrated

into our curriculum. Through drama, students can use inventiveness and discovery to enhance learning in all areas. What is more humanistic than using drama to involve the whole person? Creative drama can open many avenues of pleasurable learning for students, but the teacher must remember that the aim of creative drama is to build on students' past experiences, giving them a greater knowledge not just of themselves, but of what it is to be human, as well as developing an understanding of the past, present and future of the society in which they live (Heathcote, 1984).

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